**United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**William Helmreich Oral History CollectionPRIVATE**

**Interview with Eva Ebin**

**December 13, 1989**

**RG-50.165\*0018PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Eva Ebin, conducted by William Helmreich on December 13, 1989 as research for his book *Against all odds: Holocaust survivors and the successful lives they made in America.* The interview was given to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on Oct. 30, 1992 and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.**EVA EBIN**

**December 13, 1989**

WH: ...you were in Auschwitz, with your mother...

EE: ...we arrived in Auschwitz with my parents and my brother...we were separated...the old ones went one way...we went another way...my father and my brother survived the war...then they were taken to a camp in Germany...from there they were marched, towards the end of the war, April of 1945, they were marched to Theresienstadt and that’s where they were liberated. When we were liberated...we were liberated...we were taken to this labor camp in Lanzig, Austria...

WH: When you were in Auschwitz, did you do any work?

EE: No...

WH: ...after the liberation...

EE: ...we were divided into groups according to our homes, which in my case was Czechoslovakia, so we were taken to Prague...

WH: Tell me, this reminds me when you say Prague, what do you think of everything that is going now?

EE: It’s just incredible, that’s all I can think. We were there this summer.

WH: It wasn’t like that then.

EE: No, it wasn’t like that. It’s just amazing what’s going on. It’s almost frightening, because it seems completely out of control.

WH: It’s bizarre.

EE: Yeh.

WH: Do you like it that this is happening?

EE: I like it on a human level. I like it. On a shall we say, on a bias level, I think the Poles deserve to suffer a bit more, the Hungarians along with them, the Czechs I have mixed feelings about.

WH: Does it depend on Slovaks or not?

EE: Oh, yes the Slovaks can suffer as the Poles and the Hungarians. For ever and ever after.

WH: What about the Berlin wall coming down?

EE: I think it’s absolutely amazing.

WH: Does that make you nervous?

EE: Does that make me nervous? A united Germany makes me nervous a bit, yes. Yes. I think –ahhh, -nervous.

WH: ...people here who are not Jewish don’t understand that nationalism in these countries is often accompanied by anti-Semitism.

EE: Not often. Always.

WH: ...your home town –was?

EE: Muncatch. Munconchero...I was born in Budapest, in ’26 but I was raised in Muncautch...(after the Liberation)...my father died...and my brother and I met in Budapest...and cousin...

WH: ...you eventually went to medical school?

EE: Yes, my brother and my cousin went to Israel and I started medical school in Budapest in the spring of –1946. Which involved a lot to do, because they didn’t any certificate to the fact that I completed school, which eventually I did find a report card from the final grade of the gymnasium, but I never had any (?maturer?) certificate, because we never had it, Hitler came in April, just before it was time to take the exams. So they admitted me to medical school conditionally that I’m going to get that, that I have to have a (?maturer?) exam somewhere, which I did, and the Jewish girls gymnasium in Budapest. I recall nothing. I don’t know whether I ever attended their class or whether I just ran in to sit for the exam. Well, I have the exam somewhere. So they admitted me officially. I lived with my cousin at my cousin’s house, whose husband is a physician and I attended school. In 1948 when the Russians were really approaching...politically they were coming more apparent, it was my cousin, another cousin...it was his idea that it’s time to leave this country before it closes down...so we got to Vienna. He was a Czech citizen because he was not born in Hungary like I was, and he arranged to get some false passport for me...

WH: ...so what happened then?

EE: So, I was still hung up on my medical career, so I really didn’t do anything much with it, I kind of let it be...in the meantime my brother died in Israel, and I was kind of depressed and my goal was to go to Israel. I was going to finish medical school and go to Israel. And since my brother had died, my push decreased considerably... but all my friend they told me, What’s the big deal, why don’t you go to America. If you don’t like it, you can always leave.

WH: You didn’t have any family left.

EE: No, I didn’t have any immediate family left...I was all alone, and I wasn’t all alone. This cousin that I’m talking about, it’s my male cousin, who, my biggest surprise is living still in (inaudible European city)...

WH: So you were in Vienna now.

EE: So I was in Vienna now, this is 1949 or ’50 and I registered with the American Consulate where they told me that I needed a sponsor. ‘Did I know anybody in America?’ I said, ‘No, I didn’t know anybody in America.’ Which wasn’t exactly true because one of my cousins did come to America in ’45 and I strongly suspected, and I even knew her address, but I’m not 100% sure that I did know. In any rate, when I said I (?wasn’t?) alone, I had this cousin who took me to Vienna, who arranged for the false passport and he was really my moral supporter and to a certain extent even financial, too, a little bit...I did have assorted relatives, cousins, and we were a very close knit family, so it really did not feel so alone.

WH: ...you came to America in what year?

EE: In 1951. After I told the Consulate that I didn’t know anybody, they got me sponsorship...I’m sure, it was the Joint Distribution Committee (inaudible)...

WH: You don’t know the sponsor?

EE: I know the sponsor. Was Beth Israel hospital in Boston.

WH: So you finished medical school?

EE: Yes, I finished medical school in Vienna of June of ’51...

WH: Had you done a specialization in Vienna?

EE: No, I just graduated...Vienna University...straight medical school. And I came here.

WH: You came by boat?

EE: Yes. S.S. General Stewart...I landed in New York. I don’t think that I had any intentions of going to Boston. By the way, I knew nothing from America. I did know a little bit of English, minimal English from high school, which was mostly reading and writing, not the –oral expression.

WH: ...when you came to New York, what happened then?

EE: When I came to New York, I knew about this cousin who was in New York. And I was heading to this cousin. I also had a boyfriend in Vienna who, due to similar circumstances, he had relatives in America. He came out here. Maybe a whole year ahead of me, but there was still some wishy-washy relationship. Not a very strong one, nevertheless, he was in the picture. So when I landed, he was around. He was in touch with my cousin, so I guess that she knew already that I would be coming. She lived in Brooklyn and I remember going to Brooklyn to her...as it happened, my picture appeared in the Daily News and the Daily Mirror...

WH: Why did it appear?

EE: Because the boat arrived, which was a routine in those days, and they had an old man, and a baby and they had a doctor. And my husband calls it, ‘They had a cheesecake doctor.’ Okay? So, they have to have somebody, they picked somebody from the boat of the new arrivals. It was my introduction to American journalism, because I didn’t say a word to anybody, yet I was quoted.

WH: Really?

EE: Yes.

WH: Did you give your name?

EE: Yes, they gave my name...they spelled it correctly...they said I was going to Boston.

WH: What did they quote you as saying?

EE: Paraphrasing, they quote me as saying that I was going to Boston and I was engaged and going to be married, or some stuff like that...

WH: You weren’t engaged?

EE: No...it was just one of those things...

WH: So you were famous from the moment you came here. A million people saw your picture.

EE: A million people saw my picture, and amongst the million was my father’s cousin who came to this country years before I was born, who is a real good guy. He called up this cousin to find out whether I was who he thought I was indeed who he thought I was...and they literally became my adopted parents. I lived in their house. I mean, I really didn’t stay with my cousin for any length of time. She was a new immigrant, and she had a husband and babies, and very religious and so on. So this couple who’s name is Leo and Margey Meiseles and they lived on 90th Street and Broadway in a large spacious apartment and they literally adopted me. And I lived with them until I got married.

WH: When did you get married?

EE: In ’53. That’s two years...so they were trying in any way to help me get an internship which was very, very difficult for foreign graduate. I started my internship at Morrisania City Hospital in November of 1951. I arrived in September –6th. I met my husband in the hospital –he was an intern also. So we were both interns and the following year he went to different hospital, and I went to Beth Israel Hospital and I continued my specialization, I became a pediatrician, which is what I wanted to be. So, I was a pediatrician for a number of years. And I remained in very, very close contact with this couple, and their children, and we still are in very close contact. At this point, Leo is 88...our daughter is getting married in March, our youngest daughter...

WH: What was your maiden name?

EE: Siegel.

WH: Today you are a psychiatrist.

EE: Today I am a psychiatrist.

WH: Where did it happen, the change?

EE: The change happened –I did pediatrics for a couple of years, I had my two older children. And it became difficult to run a pediatric practice which in those days included house calls and being available all the time. And I just found it very difficult to manage, so that’s Number One. Number Two, pediatrics was not particularly challenging in those days. The bread and butter of private pediatrics, I presume still is, sore throats, upper respiratory infections and so on. In those days, it was also well-baby care was done by the pediatrician. Today, it’s done by the pediatrician’s nurse. Which means, that I had to measure head circumference and weigh and length and all that jazz. Which just, it wasn’t intellectually stimulating at all! That is the combination of being difficult and not stimulating and the fact that, as my patients, who I basically got this new-borns, were getting a little bit older and then the mothers and the grandmothers, started asking about weaning and toilet training and all the kind of stuff that they didn’t teach you while you were a pediatric resident. They taught you all the fancy obscure diseases. But none of that stuff. So I had to start reading about it, and I said to myself, if I’m going to be spending my time giving advice, I better find out what kind of advice I’m giving and better learn something about it. So that’s how I got interested in psychiatry.

WH: After how many years did you start?

EE: I started my psychiatry residency in 1960 and I finished...about 4 years later...

WH: Where did you do the psychiatry residency?

EE: Partially in Manhattan, Veteran’s Administration Hospital, then in Creedmor and then in Long Island Jewish Hillside which at that time was only Hillside...

WH: Were you in private practice after that?

EE: ...I was in private practice –about ’67 or ’68...

WH: How long have you lived in Great Neck?

EE: Since 1962.

WH: Your private practice, you started it here?

EE: Yah. Yes and no. I still have my pediatric office in Forest Hills and my husband had an office there also...and then we added this spot to the house. This was an open porch and once we built this office, I was here...

WH: Today you practice, is it children or adults or mixed?

EE: It is mixed. At this point there are more adults (?with?) children...and again, it was very much part of my other assumed responsibility such as mothering and doing all the other things, and I felt that I did not particularly want to work the hours where my children were at home. Which is you know, when the children could come. So I gradually switched over to adults.

WH: You have how many children?

EE: Four.

WH: Had you ever treated any Holocaust survivors?

EE: Only incidentally...not specifically.

WH: ...granted that people will suffer from depression, but it’s important to be able to find a way (inaudible) in distinguishing between pre-war pre-disposition, perhaps, and the traumatic effects of going through the war.

EE: That is very true, but the difficulty arises that most of the survivors were basically kids before they –experienced the Holocaust, or teenagers. So there was very little real developed personality. I say, most, there are those who were in their 20’s, or 30’s or 40’s, but at least certainly my generation were all teenagers.

WH: The average age of the average survivor is between 15-35...I was just wondering what you as a psychiatrist, or as a survivor, what you think of this literature (on the Holocaust). If you know the general trend it’s taken is that the population (inaudible)...when I did this statistically survey I learned that 19% of the survivors admitted to ever having seen either psychiatrist or a social worker or a psychologist...I could not investigate the circumstances in which they saw such a person. And I allowed the interviewers to indicate if they said that they saw a Social Worker because when they came here, HIAS said, ‘You must see a Social Worker,’ so that counted as a ‘yes’, but a number of people who had therapy (inaudible) might only be 12-15%. When I compared them to the American raised Jewish population, the number of people who saw a psychiatrist or psychologist or social worker was 31%. Thirteen points higher. Now when I told this to people they said, ‘Of course, the survivors –are resistant to the idea, they think it’s norishkeit, they don’t want to be bothered by it. But before, if I would ask psychologist what percentage of the population do they think is seeing someone they gave much higher estimates than 18%. Now, up until the time that I had done this research...(inaudible)...the problem to me is that 100% of the conclusions are being drawn based on 18% of the population.

EE: It’s true for every statistics, more or less.

WH: Yes...but most of the people didn’t see anyone, the fact is they might have needed to see someone they just didn’t. There hasn’t been lately too much emphasis pathologically... ...(inaudible)...and not enough on the normal aspects.

EE: Well, I happen to feel exactly that way you described it. I think the tension is strictly through the pathological (inaudible) and if you start out by the fact that if you want to take the real, -what shall I, the statement that the fittest survive, then you are already feeling a more fit sample.

WH: Which makes it even more wrong to focus on the pathological.

EE: Well, always in that framework, but basically, yes. The strongest and the fittest were those who survived. I’m not saying that there were no strong and fit ones who succumbed. But, theoretically, at least, with everything that was going on, you had to be strong and fit to make it through.

WH: What about those who say ‘I just made it through luck’?

EE: I think all of us made it through luck.

WH: Wouldn’t that negate though, the theory of the strongest?

EE: No, because luck holds out just so long, okay?-

WH: ...it’s luck and your strength, right?

EE: Well, luck was always part of it, okay? Because you could never figure out whether Mengele shot the fat ones, or the short ones, or the tall ones, or whatever that particular day. But when I say ‘the fittest,’ if you had any possibility to manipulate the situation a little bit, then you didn’t just give up and try to do whatever you could.

WH: What about if you were (?inaudible?) from what you saw, in other words, if people only said, ‘Well, the strongest and the fittest,’ in other words, who could pull a wagon longer, who had more endurance, who didn’t succumb to typhus, all those things are very important. And then one point a survivor said to me...’those of us who survived,’...’we weren’t necessarily the nicest, we weren’t necessarily the kindest, we weren’t necessarily the (inaudible? gentlest?). If we were, we would be dead.’ Now, how do you assess a statement like that? I’m sure that the time you spent in Auschwitz you saw all types of people. Nice ones, nasty ones. Terrence Depres, who wrote the book, ‘The Survivor,’ argued that those who shared, survived because those who shared, others reciprocated and...I am trying to be as honest as possible and (inaudible-learn?) the facts. But of course, I am only a child of survivors. I wasn’t there. I don’t really know the truth. I know the accusations, the implications, the insinuations...(inaudible)...but you are a trained individual and I’m sure that in the backdrop, now that you’re a psychiatrist you could look at this experience in a little bit more different light. What do you think of all these things?

EE: Those who shared, (inaudible) a small group, yes. It is possibly true. I mean, take the four of us, you know there were four cousins. All four if us survived –and yes, we shared, and yes, we supported each other. I mean, in that sense it helped, and it helped all four of us. Now, I was very sick in Auschwitz. I don’t know what I had...I barely remember it, but what I do remember is that we (inaudible)...had to line up for hours on end to be counted and so on. And I do remember that one of my cousins got a bucket from somewhere...

End of Tape #1, Side A

**Tape #1, Side B**

EE: ...Up to the moment where they saw a guard or the S.S.

WH: so you could get a rest.

EE: Yes...and they literally held me up with their hands for the few moments when it (inaudible-?hurt), okay? On the other hand, when my cousin got sick, and it was a question of hospitalization, or anything, we said ‘It was out of the question.’ And when another cousin had scarlet fever...it was considered almost fatal illness not only in concentration camp but in general. It was a scary disease...and it was a question since we were sleeping right next to each other, and this was suppose to be contagious we didn’t know how, who was going to sleep next to her. Now, if she was abandoned, without giving the four of us were not together, she probably would have been succumbed because some ‘stranger’ would have said, ‘why don’t you go to the hospital’ instead I slept next to her. She slept on the edge and I slept next to her and the rest lined up. So, yes, in that sense it helped. On the other hand, if you get hold of a slice of bread, and you shared it ten ways, all ten may have died. And yes, if you got a slice of bread and you didn’t have the four (inaudible) like we did, I don’t think that we really grabbed for ourselves without sharing if there was anything possible.

WH: But the sharing could be limited to your little group.

EE: That’s what I said. Sharing in a small group, I can see.

WH: What did you observe in terms of behavior on the part of other people around you?

EE: Everyone was for himself, by and large. For instance, I had a little cousin, she was 10 at the time, who came to us from Poland. She was already in bunkers and G-d knows where in Poland and she came illegally to us and we were together in Auschwitz. She was already a trained smuggler, and conniver and you name it, she was it. And she managed to get into the kitchen, and she managed to get this or that. She was not a big sharer...but as I said, a –expert because she had already put in like 5 years in Poland.

WH: Did she survive?

EE: No, she did not survive.

WH: How come?

EE: She was very young. I don’t know how she even managed to be there.

WH: ...such a tragic story...

EE: That’s right. Because like I said, so some of it had nothing to do with what you knew and how smart you were or what you did.

WH: Circumstances.

EE: Some of it was circumstances. Some of it was sheer luck. And I’m not saying that everybody who survived is fittest, but I think that in terms of the general population, yes.

WH: I’ve come to the conclusion here, that a survivor is a survivor wherever he may be.

EE: Uh, uh (yes).

WH: ...inaudible...had I started this project twenty years ago, I would have been interviewing people who were still alive then. What’s left now is really the strongest among the strongest. They not only survived, but they survived until 1989. That’s a long time after the war.

EE: Yes, but you are also interviewing the youngest...

WH: Did you feel that people here really didn’t understand what you came here?

EE: To start with nobody talked about it. For a long, long time, nobody talked about it. My children always knew, but they were not particularly interested.

WH: When did you tell them? When did they become interested if they did.

EE: They did. They always –I think they learned more stories about the family than about Auschwitz specifically. One year I may try to figure that out. I would say maybe 7 years ago, 6 years ago, not a terribly long time ago. Maybe 8. My –oldest daughter...she was married...and lived in Israel. They used to come every summer. So one summer they arrived and I think that was the first –this was already after Epstein’s book, which I kind of encouraged the children to read, and they weren’t interested. Or maybe they kind of glanced through it and the general comment was, ‘I can’t identify with anything.’...they kind of skimmed through it and the general comment was, that ‘we can’t identify with it.’...my two big ones are today 35 and 33 and the two little ones are 30 and 29...their comments were, ‘It had nothing to do with me.’...

WH: Is your husband American?

EE: My husband is born Russian, he is a survivor of a different kind because they came here in 1939...

WH: Was there anything in particular that made your children -.

EE: Well, as I said, one summer they arrived...1982...and Jane said, ‘Tell us your story.’

WH: and you did?

EE: Yes, I did...but basically, that was the first time that I got a ‘tell us your story.’ Never again was it a ‘tell us your story.’ They did want it on a tape, but nobody ever listens to it. And here and there, things come up, as my kids mature they may have some question, if they read something, I think mostly Susie. Because, maybe because I speak to her more, or she’s less preoccupied with a million other things.

WH: You were saying that...(inaudible)...was a little bit overdone. That the people who came here were pretty strong, in fact. That if you go to work in the morning, and you have children, you’re normal in one sense.

EE: Uh, uh (yes).

WH: Is there a fascination?

EE: Well, not only that, but if you really look around –I must quote my husband, who’s famous saying... ‘For an orphan, I married a girl who has the biggest family I ever saw!’ As I said, we have a very close knit family. So this father’s cousin’s children, you know, is already very close. And everybody is a cousin. I mean, my cousin Baras’ niece is my cousin. Everybody is my cousin –even HIS cousins are my cousins.

WH: ...(inaudible) –morbid fascination –voyeurism –in psychiatry...

EE: Okay, look. Some people, you know, like Judith Kestenberg, or some people who really devote their...life to a certain perspective, yes, there maybe a morbid fascination but then there’s a morbid fascination with any of these (inaudible -? such product that anybody understands?).

WH: It’s true, but morbid was a negative. In other words, (inaudible)...and I guess, in trying to make sure that it’s not a function of my own discipline...sociology deals with the normal...

EE: And doctors deal with the abnormal.

WH: Right. Because who else goes to doctors?...I’m trying to get a picture of the entire community and I see those who have problems as a small minority of the total population. I also, I guess I feel that this part of the population needs to be considered, needs to be taken into account but it’s –even though –sometimes I’ll interview a survivor and (?she’ll –or he’ll) say, ‘I never saw a psychiatrist, but maybe I could have used one.’ I feel even though people like my parents, ‘What? You’re meshugge?’...(inaudible)...I guess that I still feel that if you are really sick (inaudible)...a terrible problem, you wake up screaming at night. You’re walking around in a catatonic state of depression. You will either through yourself or your wife, husband, or your relatives or your children find your way to professional help or you may turn up in the emergency room.

EE: No question about this! –But you have to get into that state. Because those people who suffered from nightmares which they, in forty years they have gotten accustomed to, more or less, so it’s less frightening than it used to be. And they go about their daily living and they said ‘Gee, I had a terrible nightmare, but it’s time to go to work.

WH: (inaudible)...(survivors having nightmares)...you can’t repress those things, even in your sleep they’ll come out.

EE: They may come out, not necessarily in terms of the nightmares because I don’t remember any nightmares either. I’m not going to tell you that I never dreamed about this or that or the other particular picture or something. But none of it has the intensity I don’t think, forever waking up with a nightmare. I don’t recall getting up in the morning and I said, ‘Gee, did I have a horrible nightmare.’ If you ask me, ‘what did I dream about the war?’ I will tell you that I don’t remember but I do know that sometimes, and very, very infrequently, probably no more than maybe once in three, four, five years that I would have a dream that is somehow is related. And, for instance, when they had the Garden of the Finis Contini, that was a long time ago, a very long time ago, I wanted to go to see it with my husband, my husband was very reluctant. ‘I don’t think it’s going to be good for you,’ and ‘Why are you looking for this kind of stuff,’ and so on and so forth. And I said I wanted to see it. And we did go to see it. And all I remember is one scene out of the whole movie, that upset me. And that was...rounding up cattle into cattle cars. Cattle, not people...maybe I’m confusing two movies, maybe it was a western that had the cattles. This ‘Finis Contini’ when we came out, my husband was very upset, and I was much less upset. And he said, ‘How come?’ I said, ‘Because after you go through the real thing, there is no way they can imitate it.’...so you can develop a certain, well, I don’t know what to call it in terms of an emotional distance or something like, nothing can touch me.

WH: ...(inaudible)...repress it.

EE: Call it repress it, call it disassociated. It’s almost like that was another somebody.

WH: ...do you have any idea why he (inaudible but referring to a man in another interview who shoveled bodies)...didn’t dream?...(inaudible).

EE: It’s possible that he’s repressing it. It’s possible that he disassociated it.

WH: And you can do that?

EE: Yah. I may not consciously. But sometimes, you know, if you look at it sociologically, then psychosis is an escape from suffering, right? And if you have no better defense then you go nuts, right? Literally.

WH: ...the question of escaping is a very individual thing. It depends on what you’re escaping from.

EE: Exactly. But you sometimes can escape, I mean we call it a very non-working defense, or a sick defense if you escape into madness. But madness in that sense is also an escape. I mean, you have this, you can drive anybody mad sooner or later. It’s just a question how long are you going to keep at it. But you can make just about anybody psychotic with assorted, and I’m only talking about mental tortures, and I’m not even talking about anything physical. So, yes, you can disassociate, you can change your whole perception of the world.

WH: Would you say, from your perspective as a psychiatrist, what lessons can you take away from this whole experience (inaudible...)...I don’t know if you ever formalized it in your mind, but are there certain things that you feel...(inaudible...).

EE: I never formalize anything, but, not only formalize but even formulated anything. I haven’t really delved into the Holocaust in general, even my own experience. So, like I told you, I repressed a great deal. I credit that as a good defense that allowed me to function at the level that I am functioning. I really haven’t given it terribly much thought.

WH: Does it ever come up?

EE: Does it come up? In my work, very little. I am, if you want to call the word, I wouldn’t even say fascinated. It’s too strong a word. But definitely interested. If there’s anything on TV about Holocaust (inaudible) like Kristallnacht, and all that stuff, and we would go through the whole thing again. See, my husband would just avoid all of it. He says, ‘I don’t want to suffer. I don’t want to have anything to do with it. Why do you want to watch it?’ And I usually do want to watch it...War and Remembrance. ‘Why do you have to do that?’ And I can’t tell you that I’m suffering through it. I really am not suffering through it and I probably really, again, kind of disassociating the emotional part and what I usually tell him, you know, I really don’t know anything about it. I don’t know the history of what was going on. I didn’t know the history of Germany, I was a kid in 1933, and German history didn’t affect me in any way...

WH: If you had an opportunity to see a film that explored or to get information that dealt with psychiatry, individual or individuals, perpetrators, or you could see film or read something about (inaudible)...which one do you think would pull greater interest for you?

EE: The perpetrator. I saw enough of the sufferers. When I say enough, I mean the numbers.

WH: If you saw a movie that said that it was an in-depth analysis of Hitler’s S.S., the mentalities of the people.

EE: That would interest me, definitely, more than the one who were in Auschwitz with me. How do people, how can they bring themselves to do something like that? How could they? I really don’t know how they could.

WH: But you thought about it.

EE: Well, (laughs) I thought about it to this extent, okay? I really don’t know how, you know?

WH: But you know that they did it.

EE: Yah, I know that they did it. And the more that I think about it, the less do I understand on an individual human nature how anybody can do that.

WH: Is it possible that they convinced themselves (inaudible).

EE: It’s a very hard conviction, particularly when you hit somebody and really whip somebody, with saying ‘You dirty Jew!’ or something to that effect. And you are addressing a human being. So, to say that they convinced themselves that these are not human beings, I don’t think so.

WH: Do you think that Americans are capable of doing something like this?

EE: Absolutely! (inaudible).

WH: No question.

EE: No question. No question.

WH: What makes you believe that?

EE: Americans are human beings like anybody else.

WH: Are Jews capable of doing that?

EE: I think that Jews would be capable of doing it also, with lesser chances than others, because in a sense, Number One, the whole experience of the Holocaust and the suffering kind of conditions one differently. It’s hard to forget all that. But then again, I mean, the Israeli soldiers are committing atrocities (inaudible) in the occupied territories. They call it ‘individual.’ I’m not so sure that it’s so individual. Can human beings do it? Yes! Can they really psychologically, like mass hysteria, grow with it and do it? Sure! It can be done. It’s hard to understand it. How (inaudible –dare?) to understand it on an individual basis. How masses can do it, they simply caught up in mass, -not simply, but they caught up in a mass hysteria, and they just go with the flow.

WH: Do you think that there’s anything that we can do...(inaudible).

WH: Well, I don’t think that we are standing the likelihood of anything as great as the extermination of the Jews, however, the world wasn’t exactly, terribly sympathetic. In Angola, (inaudible) and other places in the world, in Ethiopia, in Uganda, and all the places where people were murdered for whatever reason. Whether it was their color, or whether there was a height, or whatever. Because they didn’t suit a dictator.

WH: (...inaudible)...are most of your close friends survivors?

EE: Yeh. My closest friends are European and survivors...

WH: Are they all relatives?

EE: No...

WH: ...do you talk about the war?

EE: It usually comes up in some form or other. But not for lengthy conversations or anything of the kind.

WH: (inaudible)...are you involved politically?...do you have strong view...?’

EE: Not really.

WH: What is most important to you? What interests you?...

EE: ...there is no question my family’s the most important thing for me.

EE: ...did you take vacations?

EE: We used to go, for many years from the time my youngest was in kindergarten, almost until she graduated from high school, we used to go skiing every year. But that’s over with. Ten years ago, we bought a condo in Florida. So, we go primarily there...in Boca Raton. And other than that, we used to go to Israel a lot...

WH: Are you a strongly identifying Jew?

EE: Oh, yeh.

WH: ...religiously?

EE: Religiously, I am identified religiously, I am not particularly observant, I’m a little -.

WH: Are you an agnostic?

EE: I don’t know if I’m exactly an agnostic either, but I’m not, as I said, I’m not particularly observant. I’m more identified emotionally, or feeling-wise, than with any kind of specific observance.

WH: Are you ever sorry you didn’t move to Israel?

EE: Am I sorry? I don’t know if I’m sorry. I never looked at it as being sorry. I know that for a long time I was very, very comfortable there. When I say, ‘for a long time,’ I am talking about visits. For a long time I always thought that we might retire there. Except that we didn’t think that we would retire. So it’s kind of (laughs) -.

WH: What does your husband do?

EE: He’s a radiologist. He was physician.

WH: ...you thought that you’d retire, but of course, if your children are living here -.

EE: No it’s not even –I never even looked at it in terms of my children are living here. I just kind of –as the years went by, I feel a certain distance between myself and my cousins which is a very –I have lots of cousins, maybe a dozen, okay? But I’m not friendly, I’m not close to all of them. Okay? Close to one, two, five, maybe six, seven.

WH: Here?

EE: No, in Israel. When I say I’m close, it’s the kind of closeness that we barely correspond. A letter is sitting here for months which I am eventually going to answer, but when we are together, the thread is very easily picked up and always going very well. Nevertheless, I feel a distance which I guess is age and circumstances, you know, like when we used to go everything was revolving around our visits when we were younger, and I guess (inaudible -? they?) had more energy and more recently when we used to go, which was occasionally (inaudible)...we went to a wedding, a cousin’s child’s wedding maybe two years ago. So everybody is busy with their own life, like here. And it kind of ends up we are spending an evening with the cousins, or two evenings with the cousins, and I lost the –ah, I guess the sense of family. The intensity of the family that I used to have.

WH: How much of your time do you spend in your normal day in your practice?

EE: ...between 6 and 8 hours in general...it’s a full day.

WH: Are you affiliated with a hospital too?

EE: Yeh, I am affiliated with LIJ Hillside...

WH: The motivations for why people committed the acts they did (inaudible) are psychological questions. Do you find that in your work, the people (inaudible)...do you find that having lived through what you lived through is helpful in any way in dealing with your patients?

EE: It’s very hard to answer because I don’t really know how it could be if I hadn’t lived through it. And, does it give me more empathy, or can I really relate to depths of despair or anything like that? Yes, I can. But who says it has anything to do with having to survive the Holocaust? See, what happens, I never give any of my patients, and there were very, very few who somehow surmised by my accent, by my being European, by my age and so on, surmised that I had to be involved one way or another. Somehow. And, maybe in all these years, I would say, maybe 4,5 if they asked me directly, whether I was a Holocaust survivor, I would say, ‘Yes.’ And first I did it very hesitantly because they have a reaction. Their reaction was, in general, ‘How can I possibly bore you with my little nonsense here, when you had that kind of suffering.’ So I was very hesitant in admitting it, because I knew that it stops them. They say -.

WH: You didn’t want to overwhelm them.

EE: And I didn’t want them to stop telling me about their ‘little suffering’ because it’s nothing compared to what I went through kind of thing. So it’s a very tricky thing.

WH: Well, does it harden a person?...do you sometimes say to yourself, ‘Why is this person bothering me with this nonsense, if they only knew what I went through –they wouldn’t do that.’

EE: No, no. That never -. I don’t see it as nonsense. I’m not going to tell you that I haven’t spent umpteen boring sessions where the topic for that particular session was ‘nonsense’ but these are suffering people. They’re not coming for fun. And they maybe not suffering today, but who knows tomorrow and certainly suffered plenty before they arrived.

WH: Well suffering is a relative matter, right?

EE: Yes. Suffering is a relative matter and sometimes they will tell me ‘here I am talking about this nonsense where all these 14 people were just killed,’ or whatever, you know, or an earthquake, or –all that, and I’m busy with my thing that I got upset last night for this, that or the other thing. Well, if you’re looking at the individual, it’s the individual suffering.

WH: How about other psychiatrists. Do they know about your own experiences?

EE: Some do, some don’t. I would think that the majority know. Maybe they surmised again, but never mention it, or it doesn’t come up, but then again, if it does come up in anyway, there’s no question that I tell them.

WH: Well there are people in Great Neck...who are specialists in this area...(inaudible...)...Hillside -.

EE: Hillside had, yes, had one of the studies that at the time annoyed me a lot, and I did, spoke up at the time because they were looking all at the pathology.

WH: Can you tell me about that? About Dr. Finkelstein, that you spoke up about it?

EE: I don’t recall. I don’t recall the details, but basically they were (at Hillside) doing a study on in-patients who turned out to be Holocaust survivors.

WH: What annoyed you about it, if we grant that people do have pathology?

EE: What annoyed me about it that I feel that there’s a tremendous amount of emphasis on the negative on the pathology among the survivors and as I started telling you, besides when my husband said about ‘(inaudible)...you’re married.’ But my point was, that a large amount of our friends and acquaintances are Holocaust survivors, Europeans, all doing very, very well without exception. Okay? And I’m not only talking about financially, but I’m talking academically, having achieved high positions and so on. The Israeli Universities are filled with –they were not my contemporaries, necessarily, but people from the Hebrew gymnasium, and they are all high achievers.

WH: They are also doing well emotionally.

EE: I presume that they are doing well emotionally to be able to be that productive. And I’m not going to tell you that some people are not high achievers and doing well intellectually and in their chosen profession are suffering emotionally, and having nightmares. That I’m not going to tell you. Or, that they may have had episodes of depression. I don’t know about all that. But if you are looking as a group -.

WH: Did you ever think or consider working with survivors simply because it’s opposed to someone like (inaudible-Jvcovy?)...

EE: I never really thought of it, of studying it in that sense, or shall I say surrounding myself with intensity of survivors.

WH: I’m asking because the opportunities were out there, everyone was talking about it, beginning of the ‘70’s, ‘80’s, everyone was writing about it. It seems to me, that you could have been chosen (inaudible)...and my subjective views enormous contribution to it, simply because you had both the professional and the inside perspective.

EE: Number One, I am not a researcher, Number Two, I am not a writer. I’m a clinician. Okay? And, so I really didn’t -.

WH: So you didn’t have that opportunity.

EE: Sure, I could have teamed up with Judith Kestenberg or with Jvcovy, or I could have teamed up with somebody, but the impetus just wasn’t there. And, I don’t know really, if it had anything to do with old age, or call it advancing age, or the (inaudible -?fact) that the Holocaust really, in the ‘70’s were just beginning to emerge as a study as an issue it’s really much more up in the ‘80’s.

WH: So there was no desire to avoid it. You didn’t feel it would be painful to delve into it -.

EE: No. If anything on a casual conversation, I may have said to both of these people (re LIJ Hillside study) that, ‘look, if there is any place where you think I could fit in, call me,’ kind of thing, but I never went anything further than that. I think that both of these people do know that I’m a survivor. And, I –with Judith many years ago, I did have a lengthy interview with Jacoby it was just a very casual conversation.

WH: (inaudible...) if you had to give a message, a statement, or a set of statements to people, about how people learn to overcome tragedy, and despair, what would you tell them, based upon what you yourself went through, What advice would you give to a person –I don’t mean clinical, because you know (inaudible).

EE: You know, it’s very, very difficult. Because I can’t say that I have a specific motivation or a specific something that pulled me through. If anything, I would have to say it’s really not as the other organizations like they say, ‘day by day,’ but maybe hour by hour, okay? At time of stress. Or at times of danger , okay? Just look at this hour, see what you can do, the best in this hour and face the next one afterwards –roll with the punches.

WH: You have to will yourself to do that.

EE: Yes, you have to will yourself. This is what I have to do now. And where is it going to lead. I don’t know, but you have to deal with this situation right now.

WH: Well it’s great advice, but you have to be strong enough to follow it.

EE: Oh, -no question about it. I’m not saying that it’s easy. But you are asking me a hypothetically question. But in general, I do think I deal more with the reality, with the here and now, than with planning for futures -.

WH: ...I want to find out what it was as a group that gave the survivors the strength to learn to live again, to hope again, to love again, to trust again, after all the terrible things that they went through. That was the question that I started this book with.

EE: Well I think probably, in a very broad sense, right after the war, in 1945, it was really a matter of clinging together. And I don’t know how many people, I mean they got married one, two, three, because they found another human being to hold hands with, or to go to bed with, or whatever. I don’t know how many people at that point consciously planned, or didn’t plan children. It may have been an unconscious need to have children immediately to form a family again. But I don’t know whether it was conscious thinking, or really an emotional need to share, and to be with somebody.

WH: And that was a need that had been suppressed because they didn’t have an outlet for so many years.

EE: Right.

WH: You couldn’t trust people in the camps as a rule.

EE: Uh, uh, (yes).

WH: ...the survivors have a higher birth rate than the average Jewish population.

EE: I suspected that. And I’m sure that there is some unconscious, something, -motivation there.

WH: ...some people who –supposed experts, told me that they started out with the idea that maybe the survivors didn’t want children because they said that, ‘The world was too terrible a place to bring people into.’ But lo and behold! It didn’t happen that way.

EE: Because they probably wanted to reconstitute –I mean, we were 4 children by design. And, -not because I had any particular conscious number -.

End of Tape #1, Side B.

Conclusion of Interview

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